

*Congressman Joe Kennedy III Prepared Remarks
New England Council Legislative Breakfast
June 13, 2014*

Thank you **JIM** for that kind introduction, and for inviting me to be here with you today.

It's hard to believe it's been a little over a year since the last time I had the privilege of addressing the New England Council. As you can imagine, there is no lack of colorful anecdotes to describe the...unique... experience of a freshman Congressman navigating his first term.

Some of the best advice I have received so far: *Be nice, be respectful, work hard, and try not to take it personally.*

Turns out, that's some pretty good advice. It's also not easy. But if you can do it-- in the midst of the rhetoric, the emotions of the day and the partisan ping-pong-- then you get to what really matters. What this job is *actually* all about.

Good policy. Informed, intelligent decisions that make the lives of the people you represent a little bit better. And that happens far away from cable news and election year antics, in the decidedly unglamorous zone of bringing facts, evidence, and data to tough choices.

That idea is at the heart of the issue I want to discuss with you today. An issue that troubles me not only because of its global implications but also because of the unique threat it poses to our regional economy here in New England. An issue that I believe gives us a collective call to action.

Science. More specifically – the systemic attempts we are seeing to undermine, defund, and delegitimize sound, proven, agreed-upon *science*.

The expressions on your faces confirm what anyone who has ever set foot in a high school classroom could probably have told me: if you want to get people REALLY excited at 8AM on a Friday, tell them you're here to talk about science.

But from the President's new EPA regulations to the allocation of NIH funding to debates about our energy future and foreign policy: this issue is both timely and troubling.

Here in New England, we grew up with science and research all around us.

Even if your parents didn't work in one of those fields, there was the Little League coach who worked in a hospital or a neighbor at Raytheon or NSTAR. Science was respected. Research was valued. New technologies came up in conversation at the dinner table.

But during 18 months in Congress, I've heard my colleagues suggest the following: that it's OK to write major scientific research legislation without the support of the scientific community; that climate change studies are political charades; and that publishing private, personal medical information on the internet for the public to see is just fine.

One of my colleagues referred to the theory of evolution as a "*lie straight from the pit of hell*." Not only does that guy sit on the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee with me – he's a doctor! Just to give you a picture of what we're dealing with.

The reason I bring this up today isn't to point fingers at colleagues. I bring it up because I worry that what starts as a colorful quote at a committee hearing or fiery interview on a talk show threatens to become something much more dangerous: a systemic, entrenched and *accepted* habit of shrugging our shoulders at the facts; at creating *evidence* to enforce an *argument* and in turn, sacrificing good policy for good politics.

My time on the House Science Committee has given me a front row seat.

Early on in my term, the Committee held a hearing on Harvard's landmark Six Cities study. If you're looking for some nice, solid research to pick apart, might as well start at Harvard, right?

Published over twenty years ago in the New England Journal of Medicine, this oft-cited study established a *verifiable* link between levels of air pollution, lung cancer, disease, and mortality.

Widely known and respected in the environmental science community, the study forms a key rationale for the EPA's Clean Air Act regulations.

But at that hearing, the Science Committee attempted to subpoena the underlying data from the study -- the *private medical and death records* of study participants -- to undermine the research itself and the regulations, which they weren't particularly fond of.

They claimed that -- 20 years later -- we needed "*independent re-analysis and verification*," despite the fact that the study had already been independently verified.

And last I checked, there aren't many Washington politicians who could peer review the work of scientists at our top-tier research institutions.

But we kept at it. Next up was the reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act -- a landmark piece of bipartisan legislation first passed in 2007.

COMPETES was drafted as a response to a report prepared by some of this country's leading scientists that found we need to make significant federal policy upgrades and investments to keep our country on the frontiers of research and innovation.

The bill passed with nearly 370 votes. Three years later, Congress authorized it again, no problem.

But this year -- no such luck.

Our committee produced an updated version that *so sharply undercut federal support for research* that it drew immediate, outspoken opposition from the scientific community, academia, and business.

The majority refused to budge, however, and so they introduced legislation that shapes the future of scientific research *without the support of the researchers who will actually carry it out.*

Finally – and most recently-- there was the hearing we held to question the *process* by which the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change prepared its latest report to policymakers. The findings of the collective, international scientific community were sobering and straightforward: absent drastic reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions, everything from our infrastructure to our food supply to our health is at risk.

And, in the opinion of most scientists, actively deteriorating already. “*Nobody on this planet is going to be untouched by the impacts of climate change,*” said the chairman of the Panel as the report was released.

To tell you how seriously some of my colleagues took those findings, let me quote one of them from the hearing:

“Climate changes all the time, of course. It’s called weather.”

Now look, scientific experiments are supposed to be questioned; results are meant to be tested; findings thoroughly vetted. That is, in fact, part of the process and the whole point. I agree completely with my Republican colleagues that the science and the public policy of topics like climate change is uncharted territory that can’t be, shouldn’t be, reduced to a battle of bumper stickers.

But that’s why we have peer review – the exhaustive process any major university or scientific journal goes through before they publish their findings, *especially* those with global public policy ramifications.

For the record, the United States’ peer review process is considered the gold standard across the world.

So, when the *vast* majority of the scientific community has accepted the idea that human actions are *at least* a part of climate change or that air pollution negatively impacts human health, maybe it's time for us to move away from hearings meant to discredit these realities and towards hearings focused on how we can tackle them head on.

All of this is true wherever you live. But here in New England, if we can't get the politics out of science, we'll feel the impact more than most.

Sea levels are rising and coastal flooding has already squeezed billions of dollars from families, municipalities, and state government.

Aging infrastructure in Gateway Cities like Taunton, Fall River, Lawrence, Holyoke, Lowell and Pittsfield can't keep up with increasingly frequent severe weather episodes – something we're all going to have to keep paying for down the line.

Businesses, hospitals and consumers will continue to struggle with some of the nation's highest energy costs unless R&D can get us to a point where renewables become price competitive.

There is no way around it: our economy has always been built on science. From sextants and whaling ships to silver and textiles to health care, life sciences, and clean energy.

Today, that proud tradition continues as Massachusetts gets more NIH funding per capita than any other state in the country.

And our entire innovation ecosystem—from the PhD to the production technician—supplies the good jobs our communities depend on. The need to protect that ecosystem is only going to accelerate in an increasingly globalized world -- as markets become even more flat, open, and competitive.

The United States is *already* running a trade deficit in knowledge-intensive manufactured goods—we’re importing more than we export when it comes to things like aerospace technology, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, precision manufacturing, and semiconductors.

With all the mind-bending, horizon-busting innovation going on in this country, we’re *still* looking overseas for the kind of manufacturing and production that we should have no excuse not to do here at home.

Left unchecked, a failure to support, invest in, and expand scientific discovery will be our economic Achilles Heel. And places like Massachusetts will bear the brunt of it.

That’s why I raise the issue with all of you. Because every one of us here today has skin in this game. And we have a job to do.

To use a campaign analogy – we New Englanders are the best rapid response team that scientific discovery could ask for. The ultimate “war room” poised to fight back against anyone inclined to doubt that science, facts, evidence and reason matter.

They matter – ironically – because it is those cold, hard facts that bring us the warmest, brightest and biggest moments of the human experience. No one can tell that story better than we can.

There was an amazing piece in the Globe last year about Cathy Hutchinson – a woman from my district, Taunton, who was left paralyzed by a stroke in her mid-forties – unable to speak or move her arms and legs.

But thanks to doctors at Mass General, Brown University and the VA Medical Center in Providence, Cathy participated in a clinical trial for something called the “BrainGate” – a tiny device planted in the brain to record thinking activity and translate it into movement.

Using the “BrainGate” Cathy was able to pick up and serve herself a glass of water via robotic arm, using only her mind – the first movement she had been able to independently control in 15 years.

It’s not just medical research that Massachusetts and New England have done well.

Thanks to forward-thinking energy policies, this region has decreased greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent since 2005. We’ve saved over \$2 billion in lifetime energy costs for consumers, expanded solar and wind capacity 10, 20, 30 fold...

We’ve even made such progress cleaning up the Charles River that we’re raising an entire generation of children who don’t know what the song “Dirty Water” is about!

This is the expertise, evidence and the testimony each of you can bring to the table. All of you - the group gathered here today – you stand at the very intersection of the public and private sectors in a state that has continually redefined what it means to be cutting edge.

So I’m asking you to not just get involved in this fight but to consider it *your fight*.

It doesn’t matter if you work at a non-profit or a tech company. If your focus is education or engineering. If science was your least favorite subject in school or if you are “really more of an English and history person.”

We need everyone involved because everyone is affected.

There are a lot of reasons New England has been such an effective incubator for good, progressive, data-driven policy.

Our premiere institutes of higher education. Our unparalleled research labs, top-tier teachers, history of leadership in elected office, and track record of inventing everything from the clipper ship to the computer chip.

But it's also in our blood.

That stubbornness, that scrappiness, a willingness – maybe eagerness – to tell you exactly why you're wrong and what you could do to be better.

Personally I like to think of it as our unique charm.

But here's the thing. Us New Englanders back up that infuriating habit of refusing to take no for an answer by proving *that 'no' really wasn't the right answer in the first place.*

We built the first universities of the New World, turning consumers of knowledge into producers of knowledge. Our inventors gave rise to everything from the sewing machine to frozen foods to the telephone. The first email in 1971 was a playful side project at a Cambridge consulting firm.

We're home to the nation's first public schools and public beaches. Healthcare reform. Marriage equality.

All of this driven by a fiercely held belief that horizons are *flexible*. Limitations are *temporary*. The way things are right now *isn't the way* they will always be.

We know this because we've been the ones to prove it time and again.

What I will leave you with is something it's tough for a recovering engineering major to admit: *science – what we do best here in New England – it matters today more than it ever has.*

Because it brings us to simplicity in the midst of a chaotic, complex and quick-changing world. Because it helps us tune out the white noise and find unbiased answers to our most challenging questions. Because it anchors us to the facts, the data and the honest truths that guide our way in lives increasingly driven by the loudest voices, most outrageous claims and extreme opinions.

What I ask of you today is that you use your voices and your expertise to reclaim a country defined by its policy – and not its politics.

Thank you!